

Acting AD/NE

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Paul Johnson article in Harpers on Spain

1. Receipt of an inquiry from the DCI regarding the article in the January issue of Harper's Magazine, "The End of the Road for Franco?" by Paul Johnson raises the question as to whether the findings of NIE 27.1-58, "The Outlook for Spain", remain valid. In brief, the Johnson article suggests that widespread bitterness exists in Spain, even among former supporters of Franco who feel that the regime has failed; that recent inflation has hit hard the peasant, worker, and middle classes; and that Franco's foreign policies are unpopular. Johnson indicates that he is impressed with the estimates he received from both Spaniards and foreigners during a recent visit that the regime would last no longer than a year.

2. NIE 27.1-58 begins: "Political unrest in Spain has notably increased since 1955, but the military dictatorship of Francisco Franco is not in danger." The same paragraph (7) includes the closing sentence "However, public disgruntlement, back-room political maneuvering, and mounting economic strain have weakened the enthusiasm of many of its supporters for the regime." Thus there is general agreement that the pot of discontent is boiling more strongly than it has for some time. At this point the two analyses divide. Johnson concludes that the political ferment in Spain will result in Franco's stepping down gracefully presumably to obviate forceful overthrow. The NIE, however, makes the points that no acceptable alternative to Franco has presented itself, that the various dissatisfied elements cannot agree amongst themselves, and that military support for and loyalty to Franco assures him security in office.

3. Paragraph 35 of the estimate addresses itself to various contingencies, including the possibility of a change of the regime, in the unlikely event that US aid to Spain should be greatly curtailed or eliminated. Furthermore, paragraphs 36, 37, and 38 are directed to the succession question. In this connection it should be noted that decisions as to when and in what manner this problem will be resolved rest almost entirely with Franco. Of course, it is not excluded that personal motivations for retirement could increase if the tasks of government are complicated by deteriorating economic conditions, but this would hardly constitute abdication to prevent overthrow.

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4. The Johnson article depends heavily on an interpretation of Spain's economic difficulties that is, we believe, exaggerated. While it is true that inflation has sharply reduced the buying power of peasants and workers the crisis does not, as Johnson states, in some areas approach a famine. Until this summer, in fact, Spaniards have been living better than at any time since the civil war. A fall-off has occurred since, but it has not been as severe as the article avers.

5. One personal observation might be illuminating. During the Fall and early Winter I have been attending the sessions of the Council of Foreign Relations Study Group on Spain. None of the experts assembled at these meetings has suggested that Franco could be unseated in the near future by any probable set of circumstances.

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